

FARMING ADVENTURE

A Thousand Miles through England on a Horse

By

J. WENTWORTH DAY

AUTHOR OF
"SPORTING ADVENTURE," "THE DOG IN SPORT," "KING
GEORGE V AS A SPORTSMAN," "THE MODERN FOWLER,"
"SPORT IN EGYPT," ETC.

With a Foreword by

THE DUKE OF GRAFTON

Farming does not exist, as the nineteenth century taught, to oil the wheels of trade but as the basis of life. . . . I believe that every breadwinner with a family should have from half an acre to two acres of land to provide himself with the subsistence necessities of life, so that in bad times, or in the face of an unjust employer, he could be independent as he was before the Industrial Revolution and the Enclosures.

VISCOUNT LYMINGTON



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD

LONDON SYDNEY TORONTO BOMBAY



THE AUTHOR AND JIM RODD ON MASTER ROBERT II AND BROWNY BOY
Photo Douglas Went, Brightlingsea

FOR
MARION
The End of the Bridle Way

First published April 1943
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD
182 High Holborn, London, W.C.1
Reprinted: July 1943; September 1943;
January 1949 (in association with B.U.E. Limited)
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Dewey Decimal classification: 631

Set in Aldine Bembo type and printed by
J. and J. Gray, Edinburgh
Made in Great Britain

FOREWORD

THIS SEEMS TO ME AN ADMIRABLE TIME FOR A BOOK SUCH AS Mr Wentworth Day's *Farming Adventure* to be put before the public, for there is no doubt that farming and agriculture generally are at last gradually being appreciated at their full value to the country even by the most prejudiced townsman. It is a pity that it should have taken two wars to do it.

I think every one is agreed that agriculture can never be let down again as it was in 1921 after the last war, but many people are by no means agreed as to how this is to be prevented. I personally foresee that some system of guaranteed prices and markets will have to be set up, and it seems to me that to carry this out a certain amount of control by some bodies, such as the War Executive Committees, must be continued, though I do not say that these bodies should remain constituted exactly as they are at present.

Many people, especially those holding official and Government jobs—or on the look-out for them—are putting forward nationalization of the land as the remedy for all the ills of agriculture. Personally I fail to see how or why agriculture could flourish any better under an expensive system of bureaucracy with the hosts of officials, showers of forms and schedules, and interminable delays which are the essence of the bureaucratic system.

I feel strongly that the loss of the personal relationship between the responsible landlord and tenant would be a great loss to the country as a whole, for it would remove a system of mutual interdependence, goodwill, and rooted interest in the land which has been of inestimable value in the past and would be a great loss to the country as a whole if it were abolished in the future.

No doubt there are some bad landlords who are not agriculturally minded and do not live on their estates. But if there is to be some control of farmers and farming, why cannot some system be devised to control the bad landlord? I venture to think that for every bad landlord there are many whose first and greatest interests are their land, their tenants, and the proper cultivation of the soil, the rearing of stock, and the breeding of good strains of blood. Their number would be very much greater if the legislation of the last twenty years or so had not been directed very largely against the landowner. Such legislation, coupled with crippling death

duties, had increasingly driven the old landowning class from the land until this war came. I am much hoping that this book will make an appeal to the general public and the townsman as well as to those concerned with agriculture, so that we may see a return of capital, human interest, and continuity of good landownership to the shires of England.

So often we who try to express our views on the land or the farming of it feel that we are preaching to the converted and that our views do not reach those who really might derive benefit from them. It is my earnest hope that Mr Wentworth Day's *Farming Adventure* may prove an ambassador and an interpreter of the views and values of those who live by farming England.

GRAFTON

EUSTON HALL,
THETFORD,
NORFOLK

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE TALE OF AN AMBLE ON HORSEBACK THROUGH EAST Anglia in war-time. I set out, first, to get well after a serious illness, on the old truth that "the outside of a horse is the best medicine for the inside of a man." And, second, to see what they were doing to revive the land on farms and manors, in parishes and villages, most of which I have known and loved since boyhood.

There were many old friends to be looked up and gossiped with, much inconsequent talk here and there, some few new friends and places to be visited, and a great many old tales to be retold.

The result is not a text-book on farming—there are too many professors and publicists busy at them already and not enough farmers with time on their hands to read them or write them. Nor is it any facile glorification of the hasty, expensive, but none-the-less remarkable work which has been achieved by the Ministry of Agriculture. Nor does it flatter the mushroom bureaucracy which has grown like fungi since the war on the structure of the War Agricultural Executive Committees. They have their own hired trumpeters to publicize their self-conscious good deeds in the Press and in the clotted-cream accents of the B.B.C.

I have simply put down the everyday views of people whom I met and recorded the day-by-day activities I saw. They are unvarnished and, with two exceptions, unaltered.

Altogether I visited more than a hundred farms and estates totaling 164,000 acres and rode just over 1200 miles on horseback in two months. Of all the farmers I met few wanted a long-term extension of control after the war, and *not one* wanted nationalization of the land. More than half said that they preferred to farm under a good squire rather than to own their own farms. All were convinced that Britain can feed herself in bare essentials for all time if need be; few expect that they will get a square deal the moment international trade is open again. But they are most of them philosophers, and nearly all men who love land with that rare, deep love of natural things which is of the essence of the English character.

The plain truth is that most English farmers, more than 80 per cent. of whom farm less than 250 acres, have done a magnificent war-time work. Theirs is the praise first, last, and midmost. Many War Agricultural Committees have also undoubtedly done well. I

saw the good results notably in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire. That is because they have ridden their lands and responsibilities like good horsemen—with a light rein, with sympathy and understanding, leaving it to the horse-sense of the farmers to get the best out of the land. But in some other counties I hear bitter complaints of high-handed action, petty tyranny, evictions at short notice and for little reason; undue favouritism; excessive waste of petrol and machinery; nepotism and jobbery; pretentious ignorance on the part of officials; and, in some cases, downright hardship caused to old men and women.

If control in agriculture is to be exercised after the war—and, personally, I should hate to see a total perpetuation of the breed of rural bureaucrats, with their contradictory orders and meddlesome clerks—I suggest that the Committee system be reorganized broadly on the following points:

(1) That a Court of Appeal be set up to which farmers can appeal against drastic decisions of a Committee.

(2) That in any case no man be dispossessed of his land at less than a year's notice provided he continues to cultivate it properly during that time.

(3) That the working costs and profits (if any) of each Committee be made public.

(4) That a high proportion of the profit (if any) made by a Committee which has taken over derelict or undrained land to farm be remitted at the end of the Committee's tenure to the *owner* of the land to set against the bill which he will be charged for drainage and/or reclamation and cultivation.

(5) That not more than one member of any family be allowed to serve, paid or unpaid, on an Agricultural Executive Committee or on its staff. This will avoid family favouritism.

(6) That no farm of a dispossessed farmer be handed over to a relative or client of any member or employee of a Committee. This would avoid the jobbery which I am convinced goes on in some districts.

So much for the broad principles of a few basic conclusions I have come to after a lifetime spent largely in East Anglia, where my forbears have lived and owned land for four centuries.

If this book brings to the townsman, who is himself almost invariably a villager at heart, some present picture of the steadfast lives, unchanging values, and English fun of our men of the Eastern Counties, and some sense of the shy beauty of our lands, it will have done a little service to those landowners, farmers, and farm labourers who for twenty years faced the economic sand-storm. At the end they made the desert bloom.

J. WENTWORTH DAY

WICKEN, CAMBS.

December 1942

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